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No Notice Of 'Big Brother'

By Tom Wicker

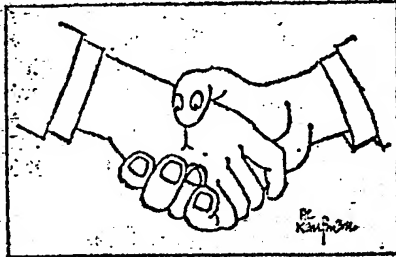
Republican oratory at Kansas City and the Republican platform adopted at the national convention seemed to leave no doubt at all that the Grand Old Party and the Ford-Dole ticket were opposed to "big government." But are they? A leisurely perusal of the platform confirms one man's memory of most of the oratory; there was no opposition in Kansas City to the biggest government of all—government by snoops, spooks, taps and plumbers.

"Oh, there's a little lip service here—"government must protect your constitutional rights," says the platform preamble grudgingly—and a little doubletalk there—"we do care about your basic freedom to manage your own life with a minimum of government interference."

There is also a warning against abuse of Federal data banks, and some good words about the privacy of financial records. But in the official Republican Party platform for 1976, year of the Bicentennial, there is not a single mention of Watergate. There is no reference whatever to the documented and confessed misdeeds of the Central Intelligence Agency, at home or abroad. Reading this historic document, no American need ever reflect that the Federal Bureau of Investigation not only did numerous bag jobs on orders from above, but also lied about these practices to its own Director! or that the F.B.I. attempted to push the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to commit suicide: or that the Bureau is now being investigated for pervasive internal corruption.

In view of the fact that a platform is a political document, it may be excusable that the Republicans omitted discussion of Richard M. Nixon and the Watergate case—although the essence of the Watergate matter was that through burglaries, wiretaps, dirty tricks, illegal cash and outright perjury the Nixon Administration not

IN THE NATION



only tried to circumvent constitutional processes but to obstruct justice in concealing its malefactions.

That's not the kind of thing any party likes to discuss in its own platform—the Democrats didn't bring up Elizabeth Ray or Judith Exner—but it's bigger government than most Nixon voters bargained for when they gave him his landslide in 1972. (So, in all probability, was the singlehanded decision of the unelected Gerald Ford to pardon the unprosecuted Mr. Nixon, another piece of big government not denounced in the G.O.P. platform.)

But what excuse do the Republicans have for taking no notice of the C.I.A. and the F.B.I.—save for pledges to restore "the effectiveness of the intelligence community" and help it keep its secrets—in a platform otherwise reeking with pious opposition to big government. Most of the transgressions of these agencies were not directly chargeable to the Republicans; they apparently occurred with as much enthusiasm and as little control under the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations as under the Nixon-Agnew-Ford Administration.

Why shouldn't a party opposed to big government denounce illegal mail openings? Why isn't unwarranted wiretapping as much an invasion of "your basic freedom to manage your own life" as a judge's busing order? Who is kidding whom about the need for "less government" when nothing is said about the C.I.A. conducting illicit surveillances of thousands of Americans, or the F.B.I. disrupting political organizations and harassing political dissenters?

I put such questions to a conservative friend at the Kansas City convention and he replied a little defensively: "Oh, I suppose our people think things like that are necessary for national security."

No doubt that's it, because despite Republican opposition to big government, the party's platform also calls for a "major modernization program for our strategic missile and bomber forces, the development of a new and intercontinental ballistic missile, a new missile-launching submarine force and a modern bomber—the B-1 . . . a major ship-building program . . . new fighters and interceptor aircraft for the Air Force, Navy and Marines."

The platform does not explain how the party will provide these massive forces through "less government, less spending." Can it be that the Republicans really are not opposed to big government as such, but are dedicated rather to this proposition from the second paragraph of their platform: "In other words, we want you to retain more of your own money . . . to use as you see fit . . ."

Maybe to buy privacy with—or free speech, or political dissent, or even unopened mail.